TRANSCRIPT—KAREN KING MILLER

Interviewee: Karen King Miller

Interviewer: Joe Newman

Interview Date: September 1, 2018

Location: Stephens Lee High School, Asheville, NC

Length: 1 digital recording; 00:11:02

Transcriber: Alice Helms

Transcription Date: October 31, 2018

Joe Newman: This is Joe Newman. We're at Stephens-Lee High School, the old gym, for the reunion of the class of 1968 and the woman I'm talking to today has a wonderful fiftieth reunion t-shirt on. What is your name?

Karen King: At that time, Karen King ( ).

JN: And, when were you born?

KK: 1950.

JN: 1950. I'm 1947 so I've got you by three years. I was class of sixty-five in high school. I grew up in the Atlanta area. Where were you born, Karen?

KK: Here in Asheville.

JN: Where do you live now?

KK: Here in Asheville.

JN: What street or in what neighborhood did you live in when you went to Stephens-Lee and then to South French Broad?

KK: I lived in the community of Hillcrest Apartments. At that time it was a community.

JN: It has changed some, I'm sure.

KK: Yes it has, that's why ( ) at that time it was a community.

JN: And you attended Stephens-Lee for the last year it was open.

KK: Our class was the last entering class so we only went the school year of 1964 to June of 1965.

JN: There must have been a lot of tears in that year, to know, especially from the older students, but maybe in your class, to know that that was the last year of Stephens-Lee and even though the people who continued on would be together at South French Broad, there must have been some regrets.

KK: More so—just in my opinion, I'm not going to say regrets of moving to the new school, but the possibility of what was going to happen to these sacred walls.

JN: And I wish we had not lost that building. Y'all didn't have a crystal ball and it would have been impossible to foresee what was going to happen. What happened after you graduated from South French Broad?

KK: After I graduated from South French Broad, I left Asheville.

JN: Did you go to college?

KK: Just for a little while. I didn't complete it.

JN: Where did you go?

KK: ( ).

JN: ( )? The gentleman I was just talking to, Gary McDaniel. The Pastor. He went to ( ). Did you come back to Asheville after that or did you live somewhere else?

KK: I was gone quite a while and then I came back. I actually left in 1967. I actually finished school in San Bernardino, California. So by the time I moved to California, I only had about five or six more months of school so I graduated from San Bernardino High.

JN: Have you seen this wall? The teachers?

KK: Yes, I have.

JN: The gentleman I was talking to just now, Gary McDaniel, he remembered a lot of those teachers. Can you come up here with me and talk about some of them and what impression they made on you?

KK: ( ). Miss Burton was Home Economics. Maybe not. ( ).

JN: This is Miss Burton, too. I don't think they're related.

KK: They were sister-in-laws, I think. Anyway, that was the Home Economics teacher. I had Miss Forney, and there was one other ninth grader and myself, we were the only two ninth grade cheerleaders, the rest of them were upperclassmen. Mrs. Forney on top of

what she taught, she was over the cheer squad. Miss Dot Lennon was with the band. I wasn't in the band, just a cheerleader. And Mr. Sherrill is still living today.

JN: Yes, we want to interview him. I hear from his son that his physical body is not in great shape but that mentally he's very sharp. He's agreed to talk with us.

KK: Gene Hamlins is still living. He's still living. He was, I think if I'm not mistaken, he was Health, but he also was the coach for the football team and basketball team. He taught P.E. Everybody else I think has moved on.

JN: Did you have any of the other teachers that you haven't mentioned? Or did you know them in some way?

KK: I knew Mrs. Burton on a personal level because she and mu mom were friends. Mr. Burton was married to—I don't think she was a teacher. They might have been sister-in-law and brother-in-law. No, not some of them because that was our first year. I do know we had Miss Dennison, Miss Romley, she was the counselor. Miss Haith. Mr. Moore. So there's quite a few that we did have, but once we went to South French Broad, some of these teachers did go. Mr. Cowan went. Miss Foster might have gone. Mr. King was there with us. Mr. Sherrill was there with us.

JN: I believe he became the Dean of Boys at South French Broad and then the same position at Asheville High.

KK: So some of them didn't go to South French Broad. Mr. Hamlins went with us. Miss Hall was there with us. Mr. Haith was there. Quite a few.

JN: Have you seen this wall of faces and sketches before?

KK: No.

JN: You're remembering a lot about these people. We put this together—.

KK: There's Miss Wheatons. She was with us. She was Home Economics.

JN: These were people who were on the faculty for the 1964 yearbook. Not the very last one, the one right before you came to high school. We've done some research on them and talked about their backgrounds. Y'all have been working hard up there today.

KK: Yes, we have.

JN: I'm not going to keep you too long but what would say is your major memory of your high school years as far as the programs of the school and the teachers?

KK: The commitment of the teachers. Most parents knew the teachers, the teacher knew most parents and that was important. And I hate that it's not like that now.

JN: It's hard to find a school like that now.

KK: But that community of schools and community of living was combined at that time.

JN: You know so many people say that to us and there has been a lot of research done the way Black schools were before integration and many White schools too, but you can look at a Black school today, a White school, or most likely a desegregated school and you don't find the same thing.

KK: Tight connection and—. When I went to school, elementary and high school, if something happened, it was automatic that the teacher was right. 'I don't want to hear what you have to say, that teacher told me what happened.' And that made a little more

respect, a little more paying attention because you knew that that phone call, or that visit was going to be one-sided. So you might as well do what you need to do. That was when schools were in the community and had a big impact on lives. It's different. And not always for the good.

JN: I understand. I was a high school English teacher for a while.

KK: Here in Asheville?

JN: No, I grew up in the metro Atlanta area and worked there and then I was in teacher preparation down in Mobile, Alabama, at the university there, University of South Alabama, so I had struggled with these issues myself as a professional and now as a parent and grandparent.

KK: Very caring, educated, involved teachers.

JN: That word "caring" you use is one that keeps coming up in what people tell us and also in the published research on schools historically, that there was a caring, loving atmosphere.

KK: They would rather try to talk to you and possibly put you on the right road, than to label you and ( ). It was just caring.

JN: I'm going to let you get back to work, but you actually have a lot to say and I think we could talk longer.

END OF INTERVIEW.